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UNCLAS GUATEMALA 000014

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SNAR](#) [GT](#)

SUBJECT: December 31 Theft of Cocaine from Guatemala Police Storage

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

(U) 1. At about 0300 on December 31, 2005, 15 individuals dressed in black police uniforms similar to the uniform of the Guatemalan Anti-Drug Police (SAIA), and armed with AK-47 assault rifles, entered a National Civilian Police (PNC) compound and stole 475 kilos of cocaine being stored there pending destruction. Some of the assailants wore masks. After overpowering the four guards on duty, the assailants cut three locks and gained entry to the trailer where seized drugs were stored. The three vehicles used to transport the drugs and assailants were described as 1 minivan, 1 large SUV, and 1 pickup truck. All of the vehicles had stolen license plates.

(U) 2. The 475 kilos of cocaine that were stolen were part of a seizure of 997 kilos made at the Santo Tomas de Castilla port on November 15, 2005. The drugs were transported from the port to Guatemala City where they were placed in a trailer in the SAIA compound. The trailer was under 24-hour surveillance by members of SAIA and access to the trailer was under strict supervision that required the presence of two persons for storing or removing drugs for analysis, court appearances or destruction.

(U) 3. The assailants demonstrated a familiarity with the PNC compound, the drug storage trailer and the location of security forces on duty. This, coupled with the fact that several of the assailants wore masks, leads the Minister of Government and the Public Ministry to conclude that current or past members of SAIA may have participated in the robbery.

Since the morning of December 31 the PNC has executed 12 search warrants of residences located in zones 1, 3 and 6 of Guatemala City all with negative results.

(U) 4. According to the Public Ministry a request for destruction of the drugs was made to the court eight days after the seizure of the 997 kilos of cocaine. PNC Director Erwin Sperisen also requested that the drugs be destroyed shortly after they were seized. However, Judge Victor Hugo Herrera scheduled the incineration for January 4, 2006, fifty days after the date of seizure and a full 30 days after the 20-day limit established by law for destruction of drugs. The Supreme Court is reviewing the case and will apply appropriate sanctions against Judge Victor Hugo Herrera if the findings indicate responsibility. About 600 kilograms of seized cocaine remained in the trailer after the thieves left. This represents the balance of the drugs seized in the November 2005 Santo Tomas bust and other seizures made during the last months of 2005. A drug burn was arranged on January 3 to destroy the remaining 600 kgs.

(SBU) 5. According to the Ministry of Government, there are indications that some of the assailants could be part of a group known as Zeta, former Mexican Special Forces elements that are known to be working with drug cartels. DEA Guatemala and the Narcotics Affairs Section are providing support to the GOG in an effort to identify the assailants.

(SBU) 6. Comment: This is not the first time that seized drugs have been stolen from Guatemalan police storage, but following the arrest of the SAIA top command in the US in November on drug trafficking charges and public statements by Minister Vielmann and PNC Chief Sperisen that SAIA was being cleaned up, it is an embarrassing confirmation of the lack of reliability of SAIA and the PNC. Although there is as yet no proof that this was an inside job, it appears likely that there was, at a minimum, passive cooperation from SAIA members. We are reminded that SAIA's predecessor organization, the DOAN (National Anti-Narcotics Directorate), was disbanded in early 2003 after DOAN members were caught stealing seized cocaine. Corruption within the SAIA is not a surprise, and DEA and NAS are working closely with GOG officials to overhaul the organization and establish more rigorous and regular vetting procedures to guard against continued corruption. We are also concerned with the apparent willingness of a judge to ignore the law demanding destruction of seized drugs within 20 days, and will follow-up to learn how and why that happened. End comment.

DERHAM